Fort Matanzas National Monument
Monthly Resource Management Update
October 31, 2011

Sea Turtle Nesting Season Summary

The ninth and final sea turtle nest in the park was evaluated on the first day of October. The female laid sixty eggs in total, not a huge number when it is remembered that 100 eggs per nest is average. But, of these sixty eggs, fully fifty-one of them successfully hatched, a hatching rate of 85%. Not bad! So, once these numbers are rolled up with the rest of the season's totals, this is what the 2011 sea turtle season looked like at Fort Matanzas:

Stranded/Salvaged Sea Turtles- 0

Loggerhead Turtle False Crawls- 3
Green Turtle False Crawls- 1

Loggerhead Turtle Nests- 8 (a park record)
Green Turtle Nests- 1

Loggerhead Turtle Hatchlings- 307 (a park record)
Green Turtle Hatchlings- 0

Even considering the negative impacts Hurricane Irene had on hatchling development and emergence earlier in the season, 2011 was still an excellent year for sea turtles utilizing the park.

Wood Storks

Fort Matanzas hosted the annual field trip of the Florida Wildlife Society earlier this month. Along with a member of the local Audubon Society, park staff took the group on a shorebird survey, starting at the beach boardwalk and continuing around the inlet to the riverside boardwalk.

Happily, the park's feathered wildlife was out in force. The group spotted such notable species as the reddish egret, peregrine falcon, juvenile bald eagle, and up to twenty-five wood storks. The wood storks were an especially welcome sight, as they are listed as a federally endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. The wood stork (Mycteria Americana) is the only species of stork to regularly occur and breed in the United States. It was listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1984 due to degradation of its habitat which includes tidal creeks and flats, marshes, cypress swamps, ponds, ditches, and flooded fields.

What these habitats share in common is periods of low water levels. The storks take advantage of these conditions to capture fish that have been concentrated by the low water into pools. This makes it easier for the birds to catch fish by groping with their bills and allows them to obtain enough fish to feed to their chicks. In fact, wood storks won't commence nesting activities unless water in their feeding grounds is at an appropriate level. Along with fish, wood storks will supplement their diets with small reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and various aquatic organisms.